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SUBJECT: Cameroon's Separatist SCNC Still Pushing its Cause

Summary

1. (U) The Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) is an Anglophone separatist movement whose ultimate goal is a return to the two-state Federation which existed pre-1972. The movement has used violence in the past and has recently internationalized its campaign by lobbying in Washington, New York and Brussels. The credibility of the SCNC is questionable, and fake asylum cases for supposed members are common in both the U.S. and Europe. End summary.

Historical Overview

2. (U) The SCNC was founded in April 1993 at an All Anglophone Conference (AAC) held in Buea, South West Region, in order to articulate Anglophone grievances. These grievances include a return to a federation, better representation of Anglophones within the government, increased use of the English language (especially in official media), and an end to policies allegedly aimed at the cultural destruction of Anglophones as a people. In 1993, Anglophones of Cameroon decided to come together and analyze their situation within an Anglophone/Francophone State. Their principal decision was a call for a return to the Federation which existed before Cameroon became a unified nation on May 20, 1972. In 1994, the organizers of the AAC adopted a resolution which turned the AAC Standing Committee into a national movement called the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC). In 1996, new leaders took over, with more radical ideas. As of 2007, the organization calls itself the United Nations Trust Territory of the Southern Cameroons National Council (U.N.T.T.-SCNC). This name has not been designated by the United Nations, and the SCNC is not an UN-recognized entity. The SCNC motto, "the force of argument, not the argument of force," is at odds with the group's violent history.

A Violent Beginning

3. (U) The SCNC used violence in the 1990s as a means to demonstrate their commitment to the cause, and to show the Government of Cameroon (GRC) their seriousness. In March 1997, SCNC members killed three gendarme officers in the North West Region. The group also tried to burn to death a Divisional Officer and his wife in March 1997, but the couple survived. In 1999, the Yaounde Military Tribunal convicted 33 of these activists. Sentences ranged from ten years to life imprisonment for charges such as murder, looting as an organized gang, illegal possession and use of fire arms. Fifteen members are still serving prison terms. Government buildings were also destroyed through arson or gun fire. In 1999, SCNC activists seized the CRTV-Buea Radiostation and declared the independence of

Southern Cameroons. Participants in these events were arrested and in 2000, the activists were sentenced to two to three years in jail, on charges of looting and declaration of secession.

Lack of Legal Status Leads to Arrests

¶4. (U) The SCNC has never filed an application with the GRC to form a political party and has never legally registered as an organization. Although it claims to be a peaceful liberation movement, the SCNC is considered an illegal organization by the GRC because it supports secession, a cause which is illegal according to the Cameroonian Constitution. According to Section 4 of the December 19, 1990 law which governs Freedom of Association, "Associations founded in support of a cause or in view of a purpose contrary to the Constitution, the law and public policy, as well as those whose purpose is to undermine especially security, the integrity of the national territory, national unity, national integration or the republican character of the state shall be null and void."

¶5. (U) SCNC members are often arrested when they meet, since illegal organizations are not allowed to meet. A group was arrested on October 1, 2008 for raising an SCNC flag on the anniversary of Cameroon's conversion from federal to unitary state. This case was recently adjourned to June 29, 2009 due to the absence of several of the accused. Twenty-four SCNC members were arrested on April 21, 2009 in Bamenda as they gathered for a meeting. The members were released quickly and legal proceedings have not yet started on this case. Ten SCNC members were arrested on May 27, 2009 and seven were released soon after. Three members were transferred to Yaounde for judicial proceedings and released on June 3, 2009.

Leadership

¶6. (U) The current head of the SCNC is Ambassador Henry Fossung, the Secretary General is the Reverend Dr. Andrew Ambeazich, and the spokesperson is Barrister Achem Joseph Ashu. Henry Fossung is a retired career diplomat with a Masters degree in Law and International Relations from the American University in Washington, D.C. He served as Cameroon's Ambassador to the Central African Republic, Chad, Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. There are branch offices of the SCNC abroad that lobby foreign governments and international organizations for recognition.

Internationalizing the Cause

¶7. (U) The absence of dialogue with the government has led the SCNC to develop an international strategy, especially at the level of the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the African Union. In the last six years, the Council has sent many legal/rhetorical documents to these organizations to make the case that Southern Cameroons should become an independent entity. In November 1999, the SCNC applied for admission into the UN as a full member of the organization. In 2000, it also applied for membership with the Commonwealth (both applications were denied). More recently, it filed a complaint against the Government of Cameroon at the African Commission on Human Rights.

¶8. (U) In 2002, the SCNC named a Head of Mission for the United States of America in Washington, D.C. (office located on K Street). The purpose was to launch a diplomatic offensive in Washington and New York that would help push the admission of the organization to the UN. These initiatives have so far failed to produce results, especially as the credibility of the organization is increasingly being questioned. Other diplomats in Yaounde have also report seeing increased lobbying by SCNC groups based in their home countries.

COMMENT: Questionable Credibility

¶9. COMMENT: (U) The SCNC is a marginal organization with a limited following (probably numbering in the hundreds). Its members seem disconnected from the realities of the current world. The SCNC has no standing in Cameroonian politics, not only because of its illegal status, but also because most Cameroonians - including Anglophones -

do not agree with its separatist ideology and strongly reject its involvement in violent actions ten years ago. Nonetheless, there is a widespread passive approval of SCNC activities as an expression of linguistic and political fault lines. Many Anglophones do feel marginalized and cheated by the Francophone majority (and sometimes their own leaders' collaboration with them). Some of them might support a return to a federal state system if it were done through peaceful means. Today, the organization appears to focus on making its case and fundraising to international audiences through the internet and other communication tools. The SCNC recently tried to garner public support to claim rights and benefits on behalf of the population inhabiting the Bakassi region, arguing that this population has a similar claim against the GRC. This attempt has not been successful to date.

¶10. (U) There have been allegations that the SCNC makes money from providing fake asylum documents to Cameroonians in the U.S. Some people see asylum fraud as the organization's main purpose, although it is difficult to confirm such allegations. In an interview with "The Herald" newspaper in 2003, Sam Ekontang Elad (Chairman of the 1993 All Anglophone Conference) said that when his leadership team left, "the new leadership had no vision and saw the Cause as a source for enriching themselves." There have been many cases of Cameroonians claiming asylum in the U.S. because they allege that they fear persecution as members of the SCNC; many of these claims were later found to be fraudulent. European countries have also seen a large number of fraudulent asylum cases, but have found that numbers slowed after most cases were denied. While it is very difficult for post to accurately evaluate the volume of SCNC claims, they number several hundred annually, with perhaps half of them being approved. Post has been asked by the Department of Homeland Security to investigate a few dozen suspect cases in the past three years and has found every one of them to be fraudulent. Recently, Cameroonian lawyer Patrick Tzeuton, a specialist in bogus SCNC claims based in Maryland, was convicted of immigration fraud and sentenced to five years in federal prison and three years of supervised release for assisting hundreds of his countrymen in making false claims for asylum. This conviction and the eroding credibility of the SCNC seem to be pushing Cameroonians to favor other claims as the basis for asylum. For example, asylum applicants now routinely allege that membership in the main opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) has led to their persecution.

¶11. (SBU) The SCNC leadership is elusive and its support base is difficult to assess. We believe its domestic following is very small. The organization is not considered to be a significant player in mainstream Cameroonian politics and appears to have a larger support base outside Cameroon than domestically. As many of the founding members age and fewer new members join, the organization increasingly appears out of touch. If, however, a dynamic leader enters the picture, or if armed resistance is perceived as being a viable alternative, the SCNC could transform into a violent alternative to the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the leading opposition party in Cameroon. One senior SDF contact told us, for example, that he believes SCNC members were involved in sparking the nationwide February 2008 riots. END COMMENT

GARVEY